

May 7, 2010

Talk Early and Talk Often to Discourage Underage Drinking

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The teen years are a time of adventure, challenges, and taking risks. Unfortunately, alcohol may have a special appeal for young people, and drinking is often one of the risks teens take.

Adolescents are curious about alcohol. Between the ages of 9 and 13, many begin to think underage drinking is OK and some even start to experiment. Studies show that nationally, 40 percent will try drinking by the time they reach 8th grade.

It's time to change how we all think and talk about underage drinking. We need to stop accepting underage drinking and start discouraging it.

Parents and other adults can help young people understand that it's not OK for them to drink alcohol. The discussion needs to start long before youth start thinking about drinking. In addition to it being illegal and unsafe, young people should know that alcohol affects a teen's body and behavior in different ways from adults. And they don't realize that drinking can also harm other people, too.

Over 70 percent of adolescents say parents are the leading influence in their decision to drink or not. When parents give a clear message that underage alcohol use is unacceptable, it can make a big difference in their children's lives. Talk to your kids, and talk often to discourage underage drinking. Give them the information they need to make good decisions.

More information to help families with this important issue can be found at www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/FamilyGuide.pdf.